JIṢṆUGUPTA OF NEPAL (C. 643-664 A.D.)

By

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Like many gaps in the history of India, there are many innumerable lacunae in the history of Nepal. There is no unanimity among the scholars with regard to even a single point in the history of Nepal. The nature of evidence is so confusing and conflicting that it is very difficult to arrive at any definite truth. In this paper, an attempt has been made to present a study of the reign of Jiṣṇugupta, based mainly on his own inscriptions.

It appears that the political heritage of Aṁśuvarman was ably carried out by Jiṣṇugupta. It has been held that side by side with the Licchhavis, the Guptas also ruled in some portion of Nepal. Jayaswal has connected this Gupta dynasty of Nepal with the Imperial Guptas (*Chronology and History of Nepal*—p. 61; cf.-Kirpatrick's *Vaṁśāvalī*). Levi believes that among the Gupta rulers there were eight between Jayagupta I and Jayagupta II (Levi-II-72, *IA*-VII-89). Jayagupta II is said to have settled near Janakapura Terai and his coin-mould has been discovered from Nālandā. His coins have been found at Magadha and Champāran. What seems probable is this that after the disintegration of the Imperial Guptas in Magadha and Vaiśālī, a branch of the Guptas from north Bihar migrated to Nepal and established their authority there.

Who these Guptas were ? we cannot give any definite answer to this pertinent question in the present state of our knowledge. The *AMMK* refers to anarchy in Nepal after Mānadeva II. It is believed that taking advantage of this chaotic condition the Ahīrs entered Nepal and established their hold. Levi has dismissed this dynasty as a chronological figment. Jayaswal took them to be a branch of the Imperial Guptas. Hamilton believed that the Gupta dynasty of Nepal descended from Mahipa Gopāla who came from Simrāongarh and Janakapura (*Accounts of Nepal*—p. 188). The descendants of Mahipa belonged to the low tribe of cow-herds and the Ahīrs ruled Nepal for about 175 years (*Ibid*). The *Vaṁśāvalīs* call them Ahīrs from the plains of Hindustan and these so-called Gupta-Ahīrs are mentioned in some of the inscriptions (*IA*-IX; Kirpatrick-255-57). They are said to have subjugated the kingdom of Nepal between 500 and 590 A.D. and there were five rulers of this dynasty. Paramagupta of this dynasty wrested power from the Lichchhavis. Another line of the same dynasty ruled in the Terai area and they were possibly separated during the reign of Jiṣṇugupta. Some scholars connect Jiṣṇugupta with the Ahīrs though he calls himself as having descended from the *Soma* in the *Thankot Inscription*. This is certain that Jiṣṇugupta was in no way connected with

Aṁśuvarman or related to any Ṭhākurī line. Circumstances are there to show that he belonged to a plebeian stock, might be Ahīr or something else. We have no idea about his lineage and the evidence of the *Thankot Inscription* may be construed in this way :—that is after becoming all powerful in the realm he began to call himself a *Somavaṁśī*. There was some confusion during his reign. In spite of all difficulties Jiṣṇugupta continued to be a powerful ruler as is evident from his inscriptions. Levi suggested that it was in his time that Nepal along with Tibet helped the Chinese envoy against Arjuna between 647 and 650 (Levi-II-156-59). The Chinese is said to have secured seven thousand soldiers from Nepal (*CB*-77). It is not possible to agree with Fleet that "Aṁśuvarman probably came with 7000 men to help the Chinese general" (*IA*-XIV-p. 349).

The *AMMK* account gives new and correct information when it says that Udaya and Jiṣṇu were the last kings of Nepal and after them the rulers in Nepal became dependent on the Mlechchha usurpers and kingship was lost. This possibly refers to the Tibetan invasion of Nepal. Jiṣṇu of the *AMMK* is to be identified with Jiṣṇugupta of the inscriptions. According to Jayaswal, Jiṣṇugupta was the son of Viśvagupta and the brother-in-law of Aṁśuvarman. We have shown above that Jiṣṇugupta was in no way connected with Aṁśuvarman, or the Lichchhavis or the Ṭhākurīs. Walsh connected him with the Lichchhavis (*JRAS*-1908-p. 681; cf-*DHNI*-I-191). Regmi holds that his Gupta lineage cannot be questioned (*Ancient and Mediaeval Nepal*-p. 112). In the present state of our knowledge, it is not possible to state anything definitely in this connection. If his Gupta lineage is not to be questioned then we can venture to suggest that he was connected with the plebeian Ahīr stock. All the sources go to show that he did not belong to any royal family but was a commoner. Undoubtedly he was the real wielder of political power after Aṁśuvarman. He is not mentioned in the *Vaṁśāvalī*, but the *AMMK* definitely does so (*Udayaḥ Jiṣṇunohyante*). He followed the tradition of Aṁśuvarman. Though himself a powerful ruler, he preferred to call himself a *sāmanta*. The extent of his political power and authority is evident from his inscriptions and coins. *Paṇa* and *Kārṣāpaṇa* of the *Thankot inscription* refer to the system of coinage introduced by Jiṣṇugupta. The specific mention of the *Mallakara* in the *Thankot Inscription* is indicative of the fact that he had to wage a protracted struggle against the Mallas who had gained sufficient strength in the valley of the *Saptagaṇḍakī*.

The inscriptions of Jiṣṇugupta reveal to us certain interesting details about his administration. Hitherto only four or five of his inscriptions were known. R. Gnoli has brought to light twelve inscriptions of Jiṣṇugupta and on the basis of these inscriptions, we can definitely state that he ruled for about sixteen years (*that is* between Saṁvat 48 and 64 of the inscriptions). Gnoli has further pointed out that the *Thankot Inscription* (Gnoli-LVI; Levi-No. 16) is dated 59 and not 500 as read by Levi and 44 as read by Regmi and others. The *Minanārāyaṇa charter* (Gnoli-LII; Bhagwan Lal-No. 10) describes Jiṣṇugupta as one who freed the people (L. 5). It

refers to the repair of *Tilamakam* by Śrī Mahāsāmanta. From this inscrip- [J. A. A. I.
tion it is evident that his power was unchallenged and unequalled and there was no check on his political status though he might have acknowledged the nominal sway of the Lichchhavi rulers like Dhruvadeva and Bhīmārjunadeva. The word "*svayamjāñā*" conveys that he had assumed such authority as to issue orders to feudatories and future kings. He ran a network of canals and the village committee managed the administration of such water-works. The government levied water-tax on all users.

The whole account of Jiṣṇugupta, as given by Jayaswal and Regmi, does not seem to be conclusive. The very fact that the date of the *Thankot Inscription* is doubtful, we cannot arrive at any definite conclusion. Gnoli has corrected the reading and on that basis we can suggest that Jiṣṇu continued to rule under two Lichchhavi puppets between 643 and 659. The Chinese source is also not very clear here. Levi's Mānadeva of the *Thankot Inscription* (L. 6) has been corrected by Gnoli as Bhīmārjunadeva. Bhīmārjunadeva comes after Dhruvadeva. If these readings of Gnoli are accepted, the question of Mānadeva does not arise here and that goes a long way in solving the tangled question of date and time. Indraji and Basak have rightly dropped Mānadeva of their lists altogether. Mānadeva does not appear in the inscriptions of Aṁśuvarman and not even in the *Thankot inscription* of Jiṣṇugupta as Regmi thinks (*op. cit.*-p. 114). Fleet has shown that Jiṣṇugupta was ruling in 654 side by side with Dhruvadeva in the same year (*IA*-XIV). Dhruvadeva has been omitted in the *Vaṁśāvalī*, though he has been mentioned in Jiṣṇu's inscription. To avoid Vṛṣadeva, brother of Śivadeva, Jiṣṇu appears to have set up Dhruvadeva as a puppet king against Vṛṣadeva. Jiṣṇu was a very powerful ruler and a conservative Hindu. He is called *Pasupati Bhaṭṭāraka*. Fish, *Śaṅkha*, *Chakra*, reclining Bull etc., are generally found in inscriptional stones. He spent his time in looking to the welfare of his own people, in erecting temples and canals and in stabilising his constitutional position. The confused character of the Nepalese sources does not enable us to present the scientific picture of the contemporary political history. Taking into consideration all the conflicting sources we can simply state, with reservation, that Mānadeva, Dhruvadeva and Bhīmārjundeva and Narendradeva were ruling in Nepal at a period when Jiṣṇugupta was at the height of his power as a *sāmanta*.

The inscriptional evidences are noted below:

(*i*) Inscription No. 9 of Bhagwan Lal (*IA*-IX) is No. L of Gnoli dated Saṁvat 48 (R. Gnoli-*Nepalese Inscriptions in Gupta characters* Nos.-L to LXII). Here it has been pointed out that Jiṣṇu's rule was "*Samastapaurāśritasāsano*". He asserts that his orders are obeyed by all citizens. The epigraph suggests that the feudal lord Chandravarman addressed a note to Jiṣṇugupta for the repair of a water canal which was consequently done and a reassessment was made. In support of his contention, Jayaswal depends upon this inscription.

(*ii*) Gnoli-LI : It was not known either to Levi or to Bhagwanlal. It is dated in Saṁvat 49. It refers to the reign of Lichchhavi king Dhruvadeva. Since the text is completely dilapidated, it is very difficult to make out a coherent account. The only important point that can be made out is that Jiṣnu was ruling as a powerful *sāmant*.

(*iii*) Gnoli-LII : (Bhagwanlal No. 10) : The date is missing. It states, Dhruvadeva was ruling at Mangriha and Jiṣṇugupta was the Mahāsāmanta. On account of the defective character of the epigraph, Fleet suggested that the text may mean nothing more than a courteous reference to one whose position was equal to his own. It is not possible to accept the findings of Fleet as we have shown on the basis of this epigraph that Jiṣṇu was a powerful Mahāsāmanta while Dhruvadeva a mere puppet.

(*iv*) Gnoli-LIII-(Neither in Levi nor in Bhagwanlal) : The date is not clear. It refers to the establishment of a temple of "*Bhagavān Nātheśvara*". In Lines 5-6, it gives a list of names.

(*v*) Gnoli-LV : It is dated Saṁvat 55. By this time Dhruvadeva seems to have been succeeded by Bhīmārjunadeva. The record confirms the orders of the previous rulers.

(*vi*) Gnoli-LVI : (Levi-No. 16). better known as the *Thankot Inscription*. It is dated in Saṁvat 59 and the name of the ruling king is not Mānadeva as suggested by Levi and followed by others but Bhīmārjundeva. This epigraph is important as it gives an account of the dynasty of Jiṣṇu claiming to be *Somavaṁśī*. His claim to sovereignty by hereditary right and popular support is sought to be established on the basis of this text. It also refers to the *Mallakara*.

(*vii*) Gnoli-LVIII-It is dated in Saṁvat 59. Name of the king is missing.

(*viii*) Gnoli-LVIII. The date is missing and the name of the king is Bhīmārjunadeva. It also refers to the *Mallakara*.

(*ix*) Gnoli-LIX (Bhagwanlal No. 11). The date is missing. This epigraph is important in the sense that it does not refer to the ruling king and describes Jiṣṇugupta as "*Svasti Śrī Jiṣṇuguptasya pravardhamānavijayarājye āchārya bhagavat pranarddanapraṇakauśikeṇa Bhagavataḥ schatracaṇḍeśvaraṁ*. . . . . . (Lines 9-12). He seems to have wielded all power at this time and hence the real ruler is not mentioned here. It gives an account of the measures for repairing the sanctuary.

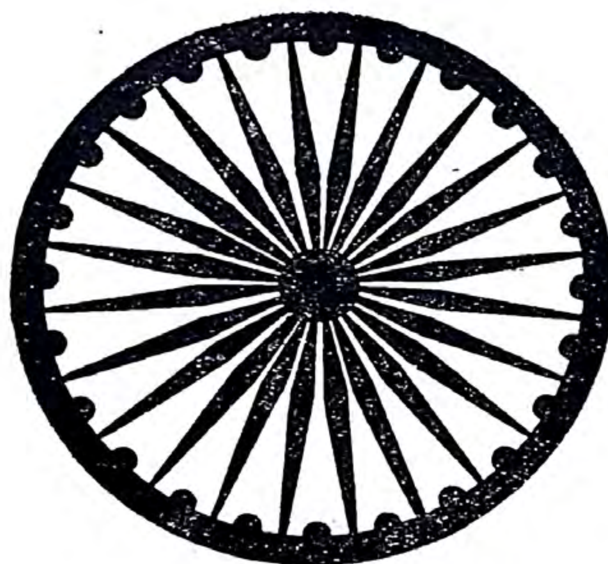
(*x*) Gnoli-LX : There is no date. Jiṣṇu is independently mentioned.

(*xi*) Gnoli-LXI : The inscription is dated Saṁvat 64.

Abbreviations : *IA*—Indian Antiquary
CB—R. K. Chaudhary—History of Bihar.

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